



ADDRESS TO THE PUBLIC,

London - III
FROM THE

SOCIETY FOR CONSTITUTIONAL INFORMATION.

IN the venerable Constitution handed down to us, through a long succession of ages, from our Saxon and British ancestors, this is the basis and the vital principle—**LAW, TO BIND ALL, MUST BE ASSENTED TO BY ALL.**

And it was their felicity to have made that “best discovery of political wisdom,” whereby this assent of all throughout the realm was to be collected and carried into execution; namely, a freely-chosen, a full and equal REPRESENTATION. But it was foreseen, that to delegate the power of enacting Laws to a single assembly of Representatives, or to a single Council, or a single Magistrate, would be to establish at once a despotism; and to divide it between Two only, would not provide a lasting security against that evil; for that which should once acquire the ascendant, would necessarily render itself absolute. Hence it was wisely settled that the Legislature should consist of THREE distinct powers, with different gradations of dignity, and consequently different individual interests; while the harmonizing of the whole should produce the good of the State: so that by reason of this diversity of individual interests, and the opposing sentiments and passions thence naturally excited, every matter proposed might be exhibited in all possible lights, and undergo a full and free discussion; and nothing become LAW, but through the medium of mature deliberation, and mutual concessions to that grand interest which was common to all.

These three powers we call King, Lords, and Commons.

It is on all hands agreed, that this institution of government is excellently adapted to the security of that FREEDOM which is our common inheritance. But this is only acknowledged, so long as each of these powers remains independent of either or both of the other two: for, if one of them should lose its independence, it is evident that our government, notwithstanding outward appearances, would consist of only two powers; and if two should lose their independence, it is equally evident that our government, although *three in form*, would in effect consist of only *one power*.

The moment that either the Crown, the Lords, or the Commons lose their independence, in that moment our Constitution is violated, our Government is overturned, and our Liberty is endangered.

As every Englishman has an equal inheritance in this Liberty; and in those Laws and that Constitution which have been provided for its defence; it is therefore necessary that every Englishman should know what that Constitution is; when it is SAFE; and when ENDANGERED.

To diffuse this knowledge universally throughout the realm, to circulate it through every village and hamlet, and even to introduce it into the humble dwelling of the cottager, is the wish and the hope of this Society.

They trust it is a wish that will be approved by all good men; and that it is a hope not ill founded, in a country whose love of Liberty is its characteristic, and where every thing generous, and in favour of that Liberty, is congenial with the best and warmest feelings of the people.

So extremely simple are those first principles of our Constitution, upon which depends THE LIBERTY OF THE PEOPLE, that the Society are convinced any such institution as theirs had for ever been unnecessary, had not certain of our Parliaments, without authority, unjustly, and against their fidelity, despising the wisdom of the great founders of our government, and the rights of their constituents, departed from and violated this sound maxim of popular Freedom, that "To the bulk of any nation, " destined to labour and not to study, to act and not to speculate, it is " necessary to enjoy the possession undiminished, and the constant exercise " unabridged, of its legislative or ELECTION RIGHTS, as the only possible " means by which it can retain a knowledge of those Rights, and of their " inestimable value; or by which it can preserve its Liberty."

It has been justly observed by a distinguished writer*, that "When a PEOPLE have lost the power of legally asserting their Rights, they are exposed to that which is THE HIGHEST DEGREE OF POLITICAL RUIN, the loss of even the remembrance of them." And, agreeable to the above maxim, another excellent author informs us, that "Our Saxon forefathers established their government in Britain, before the transactions of mankind were recorded in writing, at least among the northern nations: they, therefore, handed down to posterity the principles of their government, BY THE ACTUAL EXERCISE OF THEIR RIGHTS; which became the ancient usage and custom of the people, and the law of the land. And hence it came to pass, that when this ancient custom and usage ceased to act, the remembrance of the custom ceased with it. We may add to this, that, since the Conquest, our arbitrary kings, and men of arbitrary principles, have endeavoured to destroy the few remaining records and historical facts, that might keep in remembrance a form of government so kind, friendly, and hospitable to the human species †."

It is the aim of this Society to supply, as far as may be, the want of those destroyed records, and to revive in the minds of their fellow-citizens, THE COMMONALTY AT LARGE, a knowledge of their lost Rights; so that, knowing the value of their Inheritance, and the absolute necessity of exercising their Election Rights as extensively and as constantly as our sacred Constitution and its great Founders intended, they may restore Freedom and Independency to that branch of the legislature which originates from, represents, and is answerable to THEMSELVES.

That this Independency hath been unconstitutionally encroached upon, hath long, from its notoriety, been the public sentiment, and is now the public complaint: and even the Commons House of Parliament itself hath

* De Loline's Constitution of England, p. 210.

† Historical Essay on the Welsh Constitution, p. 8.

acknowledged both the justice and the necessity of this complaint, by its memorable vote on the 6th day of this month.

If there be any one cause of alarm to the People of England of greater magnitude than all others, it is such a confession as this on the part of their representatives in the legislature: it is big with solemn warning; it is full of serious admonition.

Hence all those who have a regard for their peace, their property, or their sacred laws; all who feel the tender affections of kindred, or children, or parents; all who are friendly to society, or who love their country; who are inspired by gratitude to the Founders and Preservers of this Constitution, and who wish to leave it as an inheritance to posterity; are called upon by every consideration which can awaken sleeping virtue, or stimulate the breast to wise and generous actions for their own and their country's good, thoroughly to inform themselves what the Constitution is; what is its present DANGER; and by what means it may be placed in SAFETY.

April 1780.

RULES AND RESOLUTIONS OF THIS SOCIETY.

RESOLVED,

I. That a Society be instituted for distributing tracts throughout Great Britain, at the expence of the Society, and under its direction.

II. That this Society be called *The Society for Constitutional Information*; subject to such laws and regulations as by a majority of a General Meeting shall from time to time agree upon. When Thirty members shall have associated themselves, they shall choose at a General Meeting (as temporary) a Treasurer, Secretary, and Printer.

III. That this Society be unlimited in its numbers, and that no one shall be esteemed a member who hath not subscribed and paid, at least, One Guinea towards its expence; and that no annual subscription shall exceed Five Guineas; and if any one shall choose to compound by paying down Fifty Guineas, he shall be deemed a perpetual member.

IV. That as soon as Fifty members are associated, a General Meeting shall be called, when all the several laws or regulations already agreed to shall be read over, and confirmed, altered, or annulled; and at this meeting there shall be elected a President and Three Vice-Presidents; also at this meeting the rest of the Committee shall be elected by ballot. That a Treasurer, Secretary, and Printer, be elected also at this meeting by ballot; and that all the members of the Committee, and officers now chosen, shall remain so until the General Election in November next.

V. That

V. That this Society shall hold Four stated General Meetings in the year; viz. the First on the First Tuesday in November, the Second on the last Tuesday in November, the Third on the First Tuesday in March, and the Fourth on the last Tuesday of the same month, at o'clock in the where the President and Treasurer, Two Vice-Presidents and Treasurer, or the Treasurer and Committee, shall appoint; and such persons so authorized respectively shall also have power to call an extraordinary General Meeting, by publicly advertising the same for three preceding days successively.

VI. That no business shall be concluded at any General Meeting unless there shall be at least Thirteen members present; but if Nine shall be present, they shall have power to adjourn the meeting to some future day, notice whereof shall be given by public advertisement the three preceding days.

VII. That if the Committee shall recommend to any General Meeting, that the thanks of this Society be given to the author of any ingenious and useful publication, it shall be the first business at a General Meeting to be taken up after the first reading of the minutes; and any author, so thanked by this Society, may then be proposed as an honorary member; and if not more than two negatives be put on the question, he shall be a member accordingly without any subscription.

VIII. That at the Second General Meeting in November in every year, the first business which shall be entered upon after the reading of the minutes of the last meeting (except there be a recommendation from the Committee for a vote of thanks for a publication) shall be the election of the Officers and Committee by ballot for the year ensuing.

IX. That no alteration in the rules or laws of this Society be made, unless confirmed at a Second General Meeting.

X. That all members, after the association of Thirty is complete, shall be chosen by ballot at a General or Monthly Meeting; and that no candidate shall be proposed for a member, unless his recommendation hath been presented, at least Eight Days, to the Committee at some former meeting.

XI. That no person shall be proposed to be a member of this Society, unless he is recommended by one member, and the proposal seconded by another.

XII. That if any candidate at his election shall have Two negatives, he is thereby for ever rendered incapable of being a member.

XIII. That no person shall be on the Committee who shall have had One negative. But lest such negatives should have been given through mistake, a Second ballot shall be had in both these cases, provided it is immediately demanded.

XIV. That if any person be thought an improper member to be continued as such, it shall be in the power of the Society to expel him; and that it be done by ballot, provided a majority of the meeting shall vote against his continuance.

XV. That there be stated General Monthly Meetings of the Society to receive the reports from the Committee.

XVI. That all proceedings of the Society and its Committee be fairly transcribed into proper books for that purpose by the Secretary from the rough minutes, against the next meetings of the Society and Committee.

and that every member hath a right to inspect these books by applying to the Secretary.

XVII. That all books and papers belonging to this Society shall be kept locked up by the Secretary, when not in use.

XVIII. It being absolutely necessary this Society should be certain of its funds, it is resolved, that no one shall be deemed a member, who shall have neglected paying his annual subscription on or before the last Tuesday in November in every year; nor allowed to be present at any meeting of this Society until he has paid up his arrears, provided notice shall have been sent him, by the Secretary, to one of his usual places of abode one month before.

XIX. That there be a General Audit of the Treasurer's accounts twice in every year; viz. on the Second Tuesday in December, and the Second Tuesday in May; and on those days the members of the Society do dine together at 4 o'clock at such centrical place as the Treasurer shall appoint, who shall order a dinner to be provided not to exceed 3s. 6d. per head; and that immediately after dinner one of the Auditors shall read a summary state of the accounts that day audited; and on these audit dinners each member shall have the privilege to bring with him a friend, provided he sends in his name to the Treasurer at least Two days before; and that the President, Vice-Presidents, and Treasurer shall be at liberty to introduce to dinner two friends, each giving the same notice to the Treasurer.

XX. That Five Auditors of accounts be appointed from among the members who are not of the Committee, at the General Meeting preceding each audit day, who shall have power to examine, audit, and pass the Treasurer's accounts, and to state the particulars of the same to the First General Meeting after the audit day, which accounts shall be signed by Three of the auditors at least.

XXI. That all ballots be taken by the President, or presiding member.

XXII. That no member be permitted to speak twice to one question, unless called upon to explain; and that no member be allowed to speak longer than five minutes at any one time at any meetings of this Society, or of the Committee.

XXIII. That no pamphlet or publication shall be printed at the expence of this society, the cost of which, when ready for delivery, shall exceed 3d. each, unless it is recommended by a subscriber of Fifty Guineas, except the recommender will be at the extra expence, a calculation of which shall be made, and the money paid into the hands of the Treasurer before it goes to press; and in such case, the said member shall have, at his own disposal, one third of the number printed, provided the first cost of such publication shall amount to 6d. each; but in case the first cost be under 6d. and more than 3d. the said member shall only be entitled to one fourth of the impression.

XXIV. That to prevent impositions on the Public, there shall be printed the following words on the Title and last pages of every publication amounting to a sheet or more, *Printed and Distributed GRATIS by the Society for Constitutional Information.*

XXV. That every member, whether a subscriber of One Guinea or more, shall be entitled to the disposal of a certain proportion according to the money subscribed. And for the satisfaction of the members, and that

that no error be committed in the division, there shall be a regular table of proportions made out by the Secretary for the perusal of the members who shall be first served, with their quota, if demanded, and the remainder be at the disposal of the Committee.

XXVI. That a Committee for printing and correspondence be chosen.

XXVII. That this Committee consist of Twenty-one members elect; but that every member of this Society have a right to attend and vote.

XXVIII. That Eleven of this Committee shall be appointed, and have power to act as soon as Thirty members have associated; and that the Treasurer for the time being be always one of this Committee.

XXIX. That any Five of this Committee be sufficient to do business, and to draw on the Treasurer for the necessary expences.

XXX. That there shall go off from the Committee every year some of its members, at least Ten, and the like number be chose in their stead; which shall be by ballot.

XXXI. That the Committee, provided Eleven members, at least, are present, shall have power, by ballot, to expel any one of the Committee, provided a majority of the Select Committee present be of that opinion; and at their next General Meeting of the Society the vacancy shall be filled up.

XXXII. That there be Weekly Meetings of the Committee from the First Monday in October to the First Monday in May; after which the Committee meetings shall be once in each of the Months of June, July, August, and September, with power to adjourn from time to time.

XXXIII. That there be no Tea, Coffee, or Wine permitted to be in the committee room after the chair is taken, which shall be precisely at Seven o'clock.

XXXIV. That any member hath a right to recommend to the Committee any tract to be printed by this Society, provided it shall be in the possession of the Committee for their consideration, at least Eight days (unless upon occasions which may require giving earlier information to the public) and approved of by two thirds of the members present; their opinion to be taken by ballot.

XXXV. That the Treasurer and Committee have power to appoint and agree with a fit person to be Messenger to this Society, and allot him his duty, and to discharge him on misbehaviour.

XXXVI. That all subscriptions made in aid of the Society, prior to the month of November next, be considered as temporary; and the regular annual subscription do commence from the First meeting in November.

¶ Any Ladies or Gentlemen who may wish to promote the objects of this Society, without the formality of becoming members of it, will please to remit their benefactions or subscriptions to Edward Bridgen, Esq. in Paternoster-row.

N. B. Letters of Communication to the Society to be directed
To Mr. W. Richardson, N^o 403, Strand, London.

DECLARATION

OF THOSE

Rights of the Commonalty of Great Britain,

Without which they cannot be FREE.

IT IS DECLARED,

FIRST, That the government of this realm, and the making of laws for the same, ought to be lodged in the hands of King, Lords of parliament, and Representatives of the *whole body* of the freemen of this realm.

2dly, That *every man* of the commonalty (excepting infants, insane persons, and criminals) is, of common right, and by the laws of God, Freeman, and entitled to the full enjoyment of Liberty.

3dly, That liberty, or freedom, consists in having *an actual share* in the appointing of those who frame the laws, and who are to be the guardians of every man's life, property, and peace: for the ALL of one man as dear to him as the ALL of another; and the poor man has an *equal* right, but *more need*, to have representatives in the legislature than the rich one.

4thly, That they who have *no voice* nor *vote* in the electing of representatives *do not enjoy* liberty, but are absolutely *enslaved* to those who have votes, and to their representatives: for to be enslaved, is to have governors whom *other men have set over us*, and to be subject to laws *made by the representatives of others*, without having had representatives of our own to give consent in our behalf.

5thly, That *a very great majority* of the commonalty of this realm are denied the privilege of voting for representatives in parliament; and consequently they are enslaved to *a small number*, who do now enjoy this privilege exclusively to themselves; but who, it may be presumed, are far from wishing to continue in the exclusive possession of a privilege, by which their fellow-subjects are deprived of *common right*, of *justice*, of *liberty*; and which, if not communicated to ALL, must speedily cause *the certain overthrow of our happy constitution*, and enslave us ALL. And,

6thly and lastly, We also say and do assert, that it is *the right* of the commonalty of this realm to elect a new House of Commons once in *every year*, according to ancient and sacred laws of the land: because, whenever parliament continues in being for a *longer term*, *very great numbers* of commonalty, who have arrived at the years of manhood since the last election, and *therefore* have a right to be actually represented in the House of Commons, are then *unjustly deprived* of that right: and because it has been found by experience that longer Parliaments are extremely liable to

corruption and undue influence, and to become more dependent upon the crown than upon their constituents; by which means the balance of the Constitution is destroyed, and the people's rights and interests betrayed by those who are chosen to protect them.

When the above Declaration is compared with the present long parliaments, and unequal representation of the people, which have brought this kingdom to the brink of ruin, every true friend to his country is solemnly called upon to use his utmost endeavours for the restoration of annual parliaments, and that right of voting, which God and the Constitution have given him. In his hearty labours to obtain these civil and just rights, let every one practise the Christian rule, to do unto others as we would they should do unto us. Then will that blessed æra come, when every man shall be free and happy under his vine, on earth peace, and consequently glory to God in the highest.

A REAL FRIEND TO THE PEOPLE.



EXTRACT from a Treatise of POLITIC POWER,

Written by Dr. JOHN POYNET, Bishop of Winchester, in 1556,
banished by Queen Mary.

At this time particularly recommended to the public attention.

AND because public matters of a realm, that concern all and even a man's life, wife, children, lands, goods, and whatsoever cannot be treated on by all men, but all must put their trust in a few, men ought to be wise, and circumspect whom they trust: for there be too many that pass not what become of their neighbours, so they may prosper themselves; what become of the whole realm, so their own families may stand still. He that maketh suit to be a deputy for a multitude, seemeth to fit for his own vain-glory or profit. Those that send letters not to choose this man, but to choose such a man, have in their heads more than the universal wealth of all. He that bringeth letters to be preferred, meaneth not the benefit of them whom he would serve. He that giveth money and maketh great feasts, thinketh some other fetch than the service of his neighbours. He that refuseth or releaseth his ordinary wages, looketh for some greater extraordinary reward. He that is always or oft at prince platters, or in practisers' palaces, cannot long continue the peoples' proctor.

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G R A T I S

By the Society for Constitutional Information